

Transcript - Federal Ministers discuss measures at the border to protect Canadians from COVID-19, as well as offer an update on the ongoing protests across Canada - 2022-02-15 - 13:00 EST

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Attachments: Transcript - Federal Ministers discuss measures at the border to protect Canadians from COVID-19, as well as offer an update on the ongoing protests across Canada - 2022-02-15 - 1300 EST.doc (86.76 kB)

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DATE/DATE:

February 15, 2022

1:00 p.m. (EST)

LOCATION/ENDROIT:

Room 200, Sir John A. Macdonald Building, 144 Wellington Street, OTTAWA, ON

PRINCIPAL(S)/PRINCIPAUX:

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health;
Hon. Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport;
Hon. Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety;
Hon. Randy Boissonnault, Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance;
Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities;

SUBJECT/SUJET:

Minister of Health Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra, Minister of Public Safety Marco Mendicino, Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance Randy Boissonnault, and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities Dominic LeBlanc, joined by Government of Canada Officials; hold a news conference to announce updates to the border measures implemented to protect the health of Canadians due to COVID-19.

Moderator:

Bonjour à tous. Bienvenue.

Hello. This press conference updating our border measures amid the pandemic is in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building in Ottawa on Tuesday, February 15th. I'm Greg Quinn with Market News International.

With us today, we have Ministers for Transport, Public Safety, Health, Intergovernmental Affairs and Tourism, I believe. For those who are dialing in, I remind everyone to stick to best practices to minimize outside noise and use the Raise Hand function to indicate you have a question.

Pour poser une question, appuyez sur le bouton *Raise Hand*. Please identify yourself and your media outlet when asking a question and a follow-up.

Donc, une question, une supplémentaire.

We have several journalists in the room and more on the line. I'll aim to split the time between the two groups.

That said, let's begin with opening remarks. Ministers, à vous la parole.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Merci beaucoup et bonjour à tous et à toutes. Good afternoon everyone.

Aujourd'hui, je suis accompagné par le ministre Mendicino, le ministre Alghabra, le ministre Alghabra, le ministre Boissonnault et le ministre LeBlanc. Les docteurs Tam et Njoo se joignent également à nous virtuellement.

For two years now, the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated our daily lives here in Canada and around the world. However, today we find ourselves in a much better position than we were in March 2020. We know a lot more about COVID-19. We have safe, effective vaccines and a highly vaccinated population. We have testing and surveillance tools that allow us to identify people who are infected and to track the trajectory of the virus. And we have new treatments that can help keep some patients from getting seriously ill. In addition, after two years of following individual public health measures such as getting vaccinated, wearing masks, keeping our distance and staying at home if sick, Canadians know what to do to keep themselves and each other safe.

We see this playing out right now as jurisdictions across the country are adopting and adapting their public health measures and restrictions in alignment with their respective circumstances. As we know, recent data indicates we have passed the peak of the latest wave driven by the Omicron variant. As provinces and territories adjust their public health measures, it is time to adjust our approach. This is possible because we have now multiple tools at our disposal to help us with this transition and to do it as safely as possible. These tools include a strong surveillance system, a highly vaccinated population, continued access to vaccines, access to therapeutics, both in and outside our hospital system and increasing access to rapid tests.

Today, I'm announcing that we are easing our border measures. These changes are possible not only because we have passed the peak of Omicron, but because Canadians across the country have listened to the science and to experts, followed the public health measures and taken steps to protect themselves, their families and their communities. As of February 28th therefore, the following border measures will be in place.

First, we will be returning to the random testing surveillance program for all vaccinated travelers that was in place before Omicron came in. This means that fully vaccinated travelers arriving to Canada from any country in the world will only need to take a PCR COVID-19 test if they are randomly selected. Further, and perhaps more, most importantly, fully vaccinated travelers who are selected under mandatory randomized testing regime will no longer be required to quarantine while awaiting test results.

Second, as a parent myself, I know that kids have been impacted severely and in many ways in the last two years. And that's why I'm glad to announce that we are lifting restrictions for children less than 12 years old of age who are not yet fully vaccinated and traveling with fully vaccinated adults. This means they will no longer need to wait and self-isolate before attending school, daycare or day camps. They will also no longer be subject to testing and other specific requirements. Unvaccinated travelers however will continue to be required to be tested on arrival, on the eighth and quarantine for 14 days.

Third, travelers will now have the option of using either a negative COVID-19 rapid antigen test or a molecular PCR test to meet pre-entry requirements. To be valid, the COVID-19 antigen test must be authorized by the country, the country in which it was purchased and must be administered by a laboratory, health care entity or telehealth service. Travelers who choose to present a valid negative

rapid antigen test will have to take the test no more than 24 hours before their scheduled flight or arrival at the land border. For those choosing to take a molecular PCR test, the rules don't change. It has to be taken no less than 72 hours prior.

To prove a previous COVID-19 infection, the Government of Canada will continue to only accept molecular test results, taken at least 10 calendar days and no more than 180 calendar days before entering Canada.

Finally, the Government of Canada will adjust the travel health notice from a level 3 to a level 2. That means that the government will no longer recommend that Canadians avoid all travel for non-essential purposes. I want to underscore that Canadians should still exercise caution when traveling abroad. There is still the real risk of becoming sick or stranded while abroad and having to extend their trip or find themselves in need of medical assistance should they test positive for COVID-19 while traveling abroad. Travelers should also understand that there is a continued risk that border and travel measures in other countries, as well as in Canada may change while they are abroad.

The border measures I have just outlined are transitional, or transitory measures, not permanent ones. We will be reassessing them in the following weeks and months. It's important to note that if the epidemiological situation continues to improve, if hospitalizations continue to diminish, and if Canadians continue to get their booster shots, further easing of travel restrictions could be considered in the coming weeks. This means that, again, if the situation warrants, the testing exemption for short trips, under 72 hours, for instance, could be reinstated and eventually further testing requirements could be dropped.

Je vais maintenant répéter en français pour mes concitoyens francophones. J'annonce aujourd'hui que nous, nous assouplissons les mesures en vigueur à la frontière. Ces changements sont possibles non seulement parce que nous avons fait les bons choix en tant que Canadiens, mais aussi parce que nous avons franchi le pic du variant Omicron et que nous avons suivi les mesures de santé publique et pris des précautions en vue de nous protéger et de protéger nos familles et nos communautés.

À compter du 28 février, les changements aux mesures à la frontière seront les suivants. Premièrement, nous reprendrons le programme de surveillance par dépistage aléatoire pour tous les voyageurs vaccinés qui étaient en vigueur avant l'entrée du variant Omicron en décembre dernier. Cela signifie que les voyageurs entièrement vaccinés qui arrivent au Canada en provenance de n'importe quel pays n'auront pas à se soumettre à un test de dépistage de COVID-19. Ils n'auront à se soumettre à ce test de dépistage que s'ils sont choisis au hasard. De plus, et c'est peut-être le plus important des changements annoncés aujourd'hui, les voyageurs entièrement vaccinés qui sont sélectionnés pour ce dépistage aléatoire obligatoire n'auront pas à se mettre en quarantaine en attendant leurs résultats.

Deuxièmement, en tant que parent moi-même, je sais très bien que nos enfants ont été affectés lourdement à bien des égards au cours des deux dernières années. Et c'est pourquoi je suis très heureux d'annoncer que nous levons les restrictions pour les enfants de moins de 12 ans qui ne sont pas encore entièrement vaccinés et qui reviennent au pays avec des adultes entièrement vaccinés. Cela signifie qu'ils n'auront plus à attendre et à s'isoler avant d'aller à l'école, à la garderie ou au camp de jour. Ils n'auront plus à se soumettre non plus à un test de dépistage ni à respecter d'autres exigences précises en matières frontalières.

Toutefois, les voyageurs non vaccinés continueront de devoir se soumettre à un test de dépistage à leur arrivée, après huit jours après cette arrivée, et ils devront également rester en quarantaine durant 14 jours.

Troisièmement, les voyageurs auront maintenant l'option d'utiliser un test antigénique rapide ou un test moléculaire de dépistage de la COVID-19 négatif, un test PCR, en vue de satisfaire aux exigences préalable à l'entrée au pays. Pour que le test de dépistage antigénique de la COVID-19

soit valide, il devra être autorisé par le pays dans le lequel il aura été effectué et après avoir été, et avoir été effectué dans un laboratoire, une entité de soins de santé ou un service de télésanté. Les voyageurs qui choisissent de présenter un test antigénique négatif valide devront effectuer ce test au maximum 24 heures avant leur date prévue de vol ou leur arrivée à la frontière terrestre. Pour ce qui est des personnes qui choisissent de se soumettre à un test moléculaire PCR, les règles sont les mêmes. Le test doit avoir été effectué 72 heures avant l'arrivée.

Pour prouver une infection antérieure à la COVID-19, le gouvernement canadien continuera de n'accepter que les résultats des tests moléculaires effectués au moins 10 jours civils mais pas plus que 180 jours civils avant l'entrée au pays.

Enfin, et c'est la dernière mesure annoncée aujourd'hui, le gouvernement du Canada ajustera les conseils de santé aux voyageurs qui passeront du niveau 3 au niveau 2. Le gouvernement ne recommandera donc plus aux Canadiens et aux Canadiennes d'éviter les déplacements à des fins non-essentiels. Je tiens à souligner toutefois que les Canadiens et les Canadiennes doivent continuer de faire preuve de prudence lorsqu'ils choisissent de se déplacer à l'étranger. Il existe un risque toujours très réel de tomber malade à l'étranger et d'être contraint de prolonger son voyage si l'on obtient un résultat positif au test de dépistage de la COVID-19 lorsqu'on se trouve à l'étranger.

Les voyageurs doivent également comprendre qu'il existe un risque permanent que les mesures relatives à la frontière et au déplacement dans les autres pays, comme au Canada, changent pendant qu'ils sont à l'étranger. Les mesures à la frontière que je viens d'énoncer sont des mesures transitoires. Elles ne sont pas permanentes. Nous allons continuer de la réévaluer au cours des prochaines semaines et des mois. Si la situation épidémiologique le permet, si les niveaux d'hospitalisations continuent à descendre et si les Canadiens continuent à recevoir leurs doses de rappel en grands nombres, d'autres allègements pourront être envisagés.

Par exemple, si et seulement si la situation le permet, l'exemption de test pour les voyages de moins de 72 heures pourrait être remise en vigueur et éventuellement, d'autres allègements en matière de tests pourraient être considérées et être mis en place.

In conclusion, Canadians, I'm happy to announce these changes today as I know many of us are looking forward to living with fewer restrictions. However, we must continue to exercise prudence. Let me be clear, our fight against the virus is not over. As we have seen over the last two years, COVID-19 does not follow a predictable path. It does not abide by any timelines. Canada needs to be prepared to face future waves, future variants which may or may not be smaller than the current Omicron surge, depending on how the virus continues to evolve. Today's announcement is obviously very encouraging but I will repeat it: all measures are subject to constant re-evaluation. We will continue to adjust them according to science, prudence and the evolution of the epidemiological situation.

I would like to thank Canadians everywhere for doing their part, getting vaccinated, including boosters, and following public health advice from their local officials. Our actions are part of the reason we're able to transition to this phase of the pandemic, a phase where we are beginning to learn with the virus. It's obvious but it's important to remember, we have individually and collectively the power to reduce the impact of the virus on our daily lives. Living with COVID-19 means that we must exercise this power and make smart and safe choices for our communities and ourselves.

Thank you. And I will now turn it over to Minister Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you very much Minister Duclos. Bonjour à tous. Hello everyone. I want to begin by acknowledging that I'm joining you, along with my colleagues today, from the traditional territory of the Algonquin and Anishinabek peoples.

Today is a great day for Canadian travelers, tourism and aviation.

Ce sont des bonnes nouvelles.

As Minister Duclos said, we've always said that we will adjust our border measures based on public health recommendations and this is what we are doing today. As a next step, I am happy to announce good news that I know many communities across the country have been waiting for. Currently, only 18 Canadian airports can receive international flights. As of February 28th, the ban on international flights to all remaining airports that normally receive international flights will be lifted.

Le mois prochain, d'autres aéroports pourront recevoir des vols internationaux.

This is great news for communities like Windsor, London, Fort McMurray, Moncton and many others. By receiving international flights, this will support local tourism, create good jobs and grow our economy. These airports will work with Transport Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency to put in place measures to start safely accepting international flights in the coming weeks and months.

I also want to take a moment to talk about cruises, since this season will start soon. I know how important the cruise season is to the tourism industry in many communities, like Victoria and Quebec City. This is why I can assure you that we will have more to say very soon about how testing for cruise ship travelers arriving at Canadian ports will work in time for the cruise ship season this spring.

In conclusion, I want to thank our airlines, airports, tourism operators and workers for their tireless work over the past two years. Pilots, ground crews, cabin crew, air traffic controllers and many others have kept travel safe, have kept goods moving and have kept our economic recovery on track.

Un grand merci.

The measures we're announcing today are possible thanks to Canadians who have stepped up, rolled up their sleeves and gotten vaccinated.

Merci. Thank you.

And now, I'll pass it on to my friend Minister Mendicino.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Merci Omar. Bonne après-midi tout le monde.

Good afternoon. I want to thank Omar as well for acknowledging that we are on Indigenous territories of the Algonquin people.

Since the onset of this pandemic, our government has implemented reasonable and prudent measures at our borders. As the pandemic has evolved, so has our response, always guided by the best science and evidence available to us.

Des données récentes indiquent que la dernière vague de la COVID-19 a franchi son sommet au Canada. À mesure que les provinces et les territoires modifiaient leurs mesures sanitaires, nous devons passer à la prochaine phase de la pandémie et d'adopter une approche plus durable de longue haleine.

And before I go on any further, I would like to take a moment to thank the members of Canada Border Services Agencies for their ongoing tireless work. They are literally Canada's frontline at our borders. And as Minister of Public Safety, I'm proud of their efforts which they undertake every single day under some of the most extenuating and challenging circumstances.

Canadians will recall that this pandemic began in March 2020, when we had to rapidly implement a series of new measures to protect against a virus that many of us were just learning about. At airports and border crossings across Canada, people rose to the occasion. Since then, CBSA officers have been responsible for enforcing a wide variety of public health measures which have changed with on the health situation here in Canada and around the world. And today is another moment of change.

Pendant ce temps, l'Agence de services frontaliers du Canada a été responsable mettre en œuvre les dispositions liées à l'entrée au pays. J'aimerais rappeler tous les voyageurs, même ceux qui sont vaccinés, vous devez continuer d'utiliser ArriveCAN.

Canadians traveling must continue to use ArriveCAN.

Vous pouvez utiliser l'application mobile ou le site web pour nous fournir les renseignements obligatoires dans les 72 heures avant votre arrivée au Canada.

Today's announcement is possible thanks to three big things: Canada's world leading vaccination rate, decreasing hospitalization rates and effective tools like rapid tests, therapeutics and treatments, but more than anything else, it's because of the ongoing sacrifices and collective effort that Canadians are making, and I want to thank all of them for the role that they are continuing to play in making today's announcement possible. Your efforts are helping to protect not only yourselves and your neighbours, you're helping us all get through this together.

Je tiens à remercier les Canadiens et les Canadiennes d'avoir été vaccinés et respecté les mesures sanitaires. Comme nous l'avons fait depuis le début de la pandémie, nous continuerons de modifier nos mesures en fonction de la science et des dernières données. Pendant cette situation en évolution, nous nous sommes toujours fondés sur l'information scientifique d'actualité pour mettre en œuvre les restrictions frontalières.

And as Minister of Public Safety, my commitment to you is that we will never hesitate to do what is necessary to keep people safe. And before I turn it over to my colleague, Minister Boissonnault, I'd like to provide a few words by way of an update on the ongoing concrete actions that the federal government is taking to end the illegal blockades across the country.

Following the declaration of the Emergencies Act yesterday, there has been significant progress made to secure our borders. In British Columbia, thanks to the RCMP and following a series of arrests and seizures, we have now seen that the Pacific Highway border crossing in Surrey is reopened. Similarly, in Coutts, Alberta, yesterday, the RCMP carried out a number of highly sophisticated and coordinated arrests and seizures leading to the seizures of a significant number of deadly firearms. We have now seen again in conjunction with the CBSA and the local law enforcement, the reopening of the Coutts port of entry.

The day before yesterday, we saw that, again following a highly coordinated law enforcement operation undertaken by the Windsor Police Service, the Ontario Provincial Police and with the assistance of the RCMP, a number of arrests that took place in Windsor, which allowed us to reopen the Ambassador Bridge, where roughly one quarter of all commercial trade takes place on a daily basis. While we have seen progress, it is important that we continue to secure that progress going forward.

I want to take a moment to address the situation here in Ottawa and I want to acknowledge the resignation of Chief Sloly. Now of course, this is not a decision that is within the remit or the mandate of the federal government. Our focus is to ensure that the Ottawa Police Service, as well as the OPP and the RCMP have all of the tools that are necessary to restore public order in Ottawa. I want to take a moment to highlight that an Integrated Command Centre has now been set up so that the RCMP and the OPP can share and assume command and control over the enforcement operations which will be necessary to bring about public safety on the streets of Ottawa again.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment as well to point out the tremendous degree of sacrifice that those who live in Ottawa have had to endure. And as I said yesterday, this is not trivial. We're not just talking about interruptions when it comes to people dropping off their kids at school or getting to work or moving about. What we have seen in Ottawa is an ongoing and sustained effort by a small organization who, with a very extreme ideology, has intimidated, harassed, and has broken the law in a way that is unacceptable. The state of the situation on Wellington Street over the course of the weekend is unacceptable and we have seen it now for three weekends in a row and it must stop. And this is why we're going to continue to ensure that law enforcement has every single piece of equipment, every personnel and everything that they need at their disposal.

It also explains why it is that the government took the careful and deliberate decision yesterday to invoke the Emergencies Act. And I want to update Canadians that today, we have now published the declaration of the Emergencies Act which will enable the government to quickly operationalize and bring to life the words which appear in that declaration. That includes declaring certain zones as being prohibited for assembly where there may be a risk to the breach of peace, as we have seen here in Ottawa and elsewhere, and this will be a concrete tool to bring clarity to those that are continuing to participate in the illegal blockades, that it is time to go home.

We will also be sure that through the Emergencies Act, that law enforcement have all the tools that they need, be it tow trucks, be it barriers and other assets and equipment so that we can crowd control and ensure that the flow of trade and traffic flows very smoothly on a daily basis. And here, I'm thinking particularly about communities like Windsor and Coutts and where other ports of entry facilitate the trade and commerce that is so critical to our economy.

And finally, we are taking concrete steps to give banks and financial institutions the tools that they need to put a stop, to put a stop to the flow of any funds, proceeds through conventional currency or crypto currency that may aid and abet the illegal blockades. And I'm assured by conversations that I've had with the Commissioner of the RCMP and other representatives of law enforcement that they understand the urgency of the situation so that all of these tools can be put to their disposal as quickly as possible.

This has been a long three weeks and people are in desperate need of reassurance, and especially those who live here in Ottawa. And everything that the government has done has been with the focus on protecting the health and safety of Canadians. And we are going to continue to work around the clock until we get that job done and we obviously depend on our law enforcement to now enforce the laws that the government has written.

With that, I will turn it over to my colleague, Minister Boissonnault. Merci.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Well thanks very much Minister Mendicino.

Bonne après-midi tout le monde.

Good afternoon everyone. I too would like to acknowledge that we are on the unceded territories of the Algonquin and Anishinabek peoples.

And let me just begin by thanking Minister Mendicino and Minister LeBlanc for your steadfast collaboration and work with officials in Alberta and making sure that we're able to do what needs to be done to open up the traffic at the Coutts border. As Minister for Alberta, I thank you for your collaboration and your steadfast cooperation with authorities in Alberta on behalf of Albertans and Canadians. So thank you both very much.

Ministre Duclos, merci de votre leadership et votre compassion et votre dévouement à suivre la science, comme on a fait tout le long de la pandémie.

Minister Alghabra, thank you for being the voice of people that want to travel again and the airports that have been closed necessarily, but today's a new day.

Comme je l'ai mentionné, chers collègues, à plusieurs reprises, c'est la sécurité d'abord et ensuite les voyages après.

As I've said many times, safety first, then travel. Today's announcement is an important step on our pathway of a safe and prudent reopening. This is a gradual process that puts science and evidence at the centre of our decision-making, and I want to be clear with Canadians. Travel is safe, yet risk remains. A complete lifting of restrictions at this time isn't good for Canadians or Canadian businesses. We don't want to have to snap back restrictions but we are prepared to do so if need be. A gradual process provides us with predictability, provides the, the industry with predictability and helps everyone keep moving in one direction, which helps everyone.

J'ai hâte de rencontrer en personne en toute sécurité les entreprises et les organisations touristiques d'un bout à l'autre du pays. Le travail que vous faites est ce qui fait du Canada un endroit si merveilleux à explorer.

Announcements like the one we are here making today help ensure that Canada continues to be recognized as a destination of choice. Coupled with our high vaccination rates and a focus on health and safety, Canada has a huge marketing advantage as one of the safest places in the world to travel to. And today's announcement is an important step in signaling that Canada's visitor economy is opening up, welcoming travelers for an all-important summer season.

To everyone in the tourism sector, let me say this, whether you be a worker, owner, operator, we know how long you've waited for this day. We know how hard it has been and we have had your backs and we will continue to have your backs and brighter days are ahead.

À tout le monde du secteur du tourisme, aux travailleurs, aux entrepreneurs, aux opérateurs, nous savons à quel point vous avez attendu cette journée et que vous étiez si patient. Et nous savons que vous avez attendu avec impatience pour cette journée. Nous savons à quel point ça a été difficile. Nous avons été là pour vous et pour vous soutenir tout au long de la pandémie. Nous allons continuer de vous soutenir aussi longtemps qu'il faudra. Je suis heureux qu'une fois de plus, les voyageurs et les groupes puissent se faire des souvenirs en visitant des destinations sûres et puissent profiter au maximum de tout ce que notre beau pays a à offrir.

Merci. Thank you. I'll turn back to the moderator.

Moderator: Thank you. Okay, we have a few questions in the room, so I believe first, we have Sébastien Desrosiers, Radio-Canada, then Tonda MacCharles, Toronto Star after that. Thank you.

Question: Merci. Ma question est pour M. Duclos, quoique tous pouvez y répondre. Hier donc, vous invoquez la loi sur les mesures d'urgence, ce qu'on pourrait qualifier de bâton. Aujourd'hui avec la levée de ses restrictions à la frontière, c'est un peu la carotte. Avez-vous cédé aux demandes des manifestants ou ces manifestations ont-elles influencé votre prise de décision?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Merci beaucoup. Et je, je vais répondre de deux façons. La première, c'est que si vous, si vous écoutez attentivement, tout ça repose sur des données épidémiologiques vaccinales qui évoluent depuis plusieurs semaines. On regarde ça attentivement depuis évidemment le début du mois de décembre, depuis l'arrivée du variant Omicron. Donc, c'est sur la base, comme je dis souvent, de la science et de la prudence, mais aussi la situation épidémiologique que ces décisions se prennent. Elles prennent du temps évidemment, parce que en plus des données, il faut aussi toujours agir avec prudence.

Et la deuxième chose que je noterais, c'est que l'annonce d'aujourd'hui ne change rien, ne change rien par rapport à l'approche du gouvernement canadien sur l'importance de la vaccination. Les mesures que j'ai annoncées aujourd'hui ne touchent que les gens qui sont vaccinés. Leurs, les conditions avec lesquelles ces gens peuvent voyager sont effectivement assouplies et adaptées. Mais pour les non-vaccinés, rien ne change. On sait que la meilleure protection qui puisse exister lorsqu'on se déplace au Canada ou à l'étranger, c'est d'être vacciné.

Question: D'accord. Et M. Alghabra, donc la loi sur les mesures d'urgence pourrait vous permettre de réquisitionner des remorqueuses. M. Mendicino y a fait référence, mais, pour dégager les camions, mais qu'allez-vous faire si les remorqueurs ne veulent pas participer à l'opération, comme certains nous l'ont déjà dit? Quelle est votre solution de dernier recours?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you for the question. As the Prime Minister and Minister Mendicino and others have explained, the invoking of the Emergencies Act is to provide additional tools to law enforcement agencies and communities who want to end the illegal blockades and to protect our critical infrastructure, to protect our economy. One of those tools is to ensure that tow truck operators are compelled to offer services to end these illegal blockades. So the, you know, obviously our hope is that two truck operators are able to comply with, with the requirements of law enforcement agencies.

The good news is that so far, we've cleared three blockades without having to utilize these measures. So that is ultimately our hope, but these are additional tools, if needed, and we'll deal with, with the hypothetical scenario. Someone refuses the order, law and enforcement agencies will enforce the law.

Question: (Off microphone)?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Yeah.

Question: This question, I think, is for Mr. Mendicino. Minister, I didn't hear you thank the Ottawa Police Chief and a lot of residents here are wondering who is in charge. And you've referenced OPP and RCMP now controlling the management of the situation. I'd like to know what's your expectation as to how they're going to manage the situation and end the blockade here, especially when they were already Premiers and civil libertarians saying you have not met the threshold to trigger this act?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, just first with regards to Chief Slosky, you know, I acknowledge that this is an individual who has served many years on the frontline of the public service, has crashed through many barriers in, arising to the position of being a chief of police and I think that there is an important reflection there. And as to the decision itself, as I pointed out, Tonda, that is not something that the federal government has any jurisdictional insight into. There are mechanisms that, that exist there within the, the Windsor Police Board.

But what I will say, what I —

Question: Ottawa.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: — what I will say, yes — I'm sorry, I said, I meant the Ottawa Police Board, thank you — what I will say is that the federal government is very much concerned with providing the space to have those tools, have the assets, have the personnel so that enforcement actions can be undertaken as quickly as possible. It is not for an elected representative to put on a uniform, put on a badge and to go on to the streets and to do that job. We rely on our law enforcement branch to do that work.

The invocation of the Emergencies Act is a tool, it's a new tool that we're using. It's never been used before in the country. Now, the good news is that the framers of that statutory instrument foresaw a

predicament like the one that we now find ourselves in, to afford the government some additional flexibility so that law enforcement could, for example, declare certain zones and areas that are adjacent to critical infrastructure, like borders, like our national symbols, including legislatures, like war monuments so that people who are participating in illegal blockades, which are clearly a breach of the peace, as a no-go zone.

Now that is a very tangible tool. There have been questions that have been raised over the last number of days about whether or not police have the appropriate authorities, be it in the Criminal Code or in other provincial legislation. The declaration of the Emergencies Act resolves that ambiguity. In addition to that, the framers also contemplated that there would be a need to move with great rapidity to get law enforcement concrete tools like barriers, like two trucks, like other assets in a way that is efficient so that they can move forward with enforcement operations where are appropriate.

But I want to draw a bright line about what the role of the government here is and what the role of police is. And the role of police is to now utilize those tools in a way that is obviously respectful of the Charter, in concert with provincial and municipal authorities, not in conflict with them, so that we can restore public order. No one wants to see another weekend like the last three on Wellington Street. And I'm assured by my discussions with the police that they fully appreciate that. And we now depend on them to do the job.

Question: You have not set out publicly what zones are specifically designated as no-go zones. If you could clarify if that's something you're leaving to police to do? And why are you using essentially language that it's the Terrorism Act to describe the context for enforcement measures? You described in the declaration political and ideological objectives of protesters. Why are you using that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well that's a, that's actually a very important question. And I think it cuts right to the core of what we're confronted with in this moment. There have been those who have tried to characterize these illegal blockades about vaccines and mandates and fatigue with the pandemic. That is not what is driving this movement right now. What is driving this movement is a very small organized group that is driven by an ideology to overthrow the government through whatever means they may wish to use. And yesterday's arrests in Coutts should be a, a cautionary tale about what it is that we are precisely dealing with here.

The seizure of a significant number of illegal firearms by a group that is very committed to the cause is something that we need to be very sober about. Now as absurd and as outlandish as the claims may be of this group, one only has to survey the damage that has been caused over the, caused over the last number of weeks to our economy as a result of the interruption of the flow of our supply chains, but equally here in Ottawa. Again, like, you can't overstate what people who live here in Ottawa have had to go through. People who live in Ottawa do not feel safe right now. They don't feel safe to leave their homes. They don't feel safe to walk their streets. They don't feel safe to drop off their kids. They don't feel safe to go to work. And they certainly don't feel safe to go on Wellington Street on the weekend. And that's just simply unacceptable.

Now the good news is that the Emergencies Act contemplated this kind of a moment and we've now reached deep into the legislative toolbox, yes, carefully and deliberately to give those additional resources to police so that they can act quickly and that is certainly our hope that they do that.

Moderator: Just before we take the next question, a programming note. The rules we have here, we split time between inside and outside. So after this question, I will have to give a block of time to people outside the room. Go ahead. Thank you.

Question: (Inaudible) Gray from CTV. My question's for Minister Mendicino. Yesterday after the Prime Minister announced – and you were at the press conference – that the Emergency Act was brought into place, I went down to Wellington and I talked to a bunch of

truckers, I said hey, the Prime Minister just announced that you might lose your insurance, they could take your truck, they could freeze your bank account. Pretty much everyone laughed in my face, said I don't care, I'm not going to change my mind. We're not going to move. Is it the government's position that there is an expectation that force will need to be used to remove at least some of the truckers who are on Wellington and the other streets in Ottawa?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The short answer is we certainly hope not. And the invocation of the Emergencies Act and the declaration that follows with it sends a very powerful message and hopefully a deterrent to rational and fair-minded individuals who may think that they're just participating in a peaceful protest, but are actually now comingled with something that is much more nefarious. And you know, for those that, you know, are seeking confrontation and/or violence, we rely on our law enforcement to use their best judgement on how to resolve that conflict.

Of course, we want the illegal blockades to be resolved peacefully. I mean, that is obviously the, the first preference here, and I know that police services at every level dispatch any number of tactics and techniques which are within their domain of expertise to do just that. And thus far, we have been very fortunate in that there has not been any mass break of, outbreak of violence, and that's the way we want it to stay. So to anybody who's in the illegal blockades and who thinks that this is simply a peaceful assembly, there are any number of clear signals from the government that now is the time to go home.

And of course, if people are not being motivated and one would think that the additional powers that are introduced under the Emergencies Act around seizing proceeds and funds, which is I think an instrument that we'll be working very close with the banks and financial institutions to operationalize, then here again, we will depend on police to do the job, to do it responsibly, to do it within the parameters of the law and the Charter and to do it in a way that is as peaceful as possible.

Question: You mentioned that there's an ideology by the people who are here in Ottawa to overthrow the government and when you combine that with the fact that we've been that there were a number of guns seized by the RCMP in Coutts, is it also your expectation that the trucks out on Wellington and around Ottawa would have guns in them as well?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Look, we, for an assessment of that, have to rely on law enforcement. I don't want to speculate about what may or may not be in possession of those who are participating in the illegal blockades, and this gets back to what Tonda was asking earlier about who's responsible for what? What elected representatives in government are responsible, governments are responsible for are to give police the tools that are necessary and yesterday's invocation of the Emergencies Act is another tool. But in terms of operationalizing those laws, making them real on the streets, that's the job of the police. That's the job of those who put on the uniform and the badge. And that's why we are, you know, depending on them to restore public safety in the most responsible and professional manner that they can, as quickly and as peacefully as possible.

Moderator: Okay, we're going to turn to some calls from outside the room now. I'd like to start with Mélanie Marquis, La Presse, followed by David Thurton, CBC. Mélanie, your line should be opening.

À vous la parole.

Question: Oui, bonjour. Ma question est pour M. Duclos. La première, c'est juste une précision sur le, le niveau, les avis aux voyageurs là. Vous dites qu'on va revenir à 2 plutôt que rester à 3. Juste me préciser que c'est bel et bien à partir du 28 février? Et puis d'ailleurs, sur le 28 février, pourquoi attendre deux semaines avant de lever les restrictions? Quelle est la, la base scientifique de, de ce délai de deux semaines?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Merci beaucoup. Alors la précision, c'est effectivement c'est qu'à partir du 28 février, qui est un lundi, donc c'est dans la nuit du dimanche au lundi février,

dimanche au lundi, donc, lundi le 28 février, que ces changements viennent en vigueur. Deuxième chose, sur l'avis aux voyageurs, elle passe effectivement du niveau 3. Le niveau 3, c'est qu'on déconseille tous voyages non essentiels, au niveau 2, où on invite les gens à faire preuve de prudence lorsqu'ils considèrent aller voyager à l'extérieur. Prudence, c'est deux choses. D'abord de considérer la situation aux endroits où ils pensent aller, donc de s'informer d'avance sur les conditions dans lesquelles ils pourraient se retrouver s'ils voyagent en fonction des pays évidemment, et s'informer aussi sur les conditions de retour.

Et la deuxième, la troisième chose c'est que pourquoi le 28 février? Bien, c'est parce qu'il y a des changements évidemment à faire à ArriveCAN. Il y a des mesures là qu'il faut absolument bien programmer et bien préparer pour que tout ça puisse être mis en place là correctement.

Question: Okay. Donc, si j'ai bien compris – vous me corrigerez si je me trompe – c'est vraiment davantage une question de, de planification sur le terrain qu'une question épidémiologique qui, qui explique le deux semaines? Puis mon autre question, ce serait pour le ministre Mendicino. J'aimerais avoir votre réaction à la démission du chef de police d'Ottawa, M. Sloly. Est-ce que le gouvernement fédéral a fait pression pour que M. Sloly parte? Et est-ce que vous pensez que ça va permettre de, de tourner la page, d'ouvrir un nouveau chapitre dans le, l'occupation à Ottawa?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Non, absolument pas. Il y a aucune pression qui a été mettre (sic) par le gouvernement fédéral sous la décision. C'est une décision, je comprends que c'est une décision personnelle et comme j'avais déjà dit, faut reconnaître tout le travail de chef Sloly pendant des décennies sur les premières lignes de les services des policières. (sic) Mais maintenant, notre focus au niveau de le (sic) gouvernement fédéral est de mettre toutes les ressources à la disposition pour les services de policières (sic) pour avancer des, des, une opération pour une restauration de l'ordre sur, sur les rues et pour tous les, tous les gens qui vivent en Ottawa. C'est une situation qui est inacceptable et ça c'est notre focus.

Moderator: David Thurton, CBC.

Question: Minister Mendicino, you said it in French there, if I understood you correctly. You understand that Chief Sloly's resignation was personal. What do you mean by that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: My understanding is that this was a resignation. I would just point out that to be clear, that the federal government had no role in the decision and that there are obviously, you know, relationships that exist between Chief Sloly and the Ottawa Police Board that are beyond the remit of the federal government here. Our focus is to continue to give the Ottawa Police Service, the Ontario Provincial Police and the RCMP all of the resources that they need to restore public order in, in the streets of Ottawa.

And certainly the Integrated Central Command Unit, which has not been set up, does allow for those tools to be used in a very focused manner. And I also said in French that the situation here in Ottawa has been acceptable for quite some time and it's our hope that, that public order will be restored as quickly as possible.

Question: Okay. But the Chief of Police Force in the capital city just resigned, and you could forgive people not only in Ottawa but in the country who feel like no one's leading the ship here. So it doesn't really matter what jurisdictional level of government is speaking here. I think people just want clarity, assurance. Can you tell us as much as you know what you know about the reason Sloly resigned? You said it's for personal reasons. I think you need to say something more than that.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No. I just want to be clear. The decision was taken by Chief Sloly, completely independent from the federal government. And, you know, obviously those are

questions that will be put to Chief Sloly. Our focus is to provide tools and resources to the police so that they can do the job of restoring public safety and that is our focus. And yesterday's declaration of the Emergencies Act, which was an unprecedented moment in our country history, was another way in which we could make available to the disposal of the Ottawa Police Service, the OPP and the RCMP all of the things that they need, be it the ability to declare certain zones as being prohibited from public assembly, the ability to commandeer assets like tow trucks, like barriers, be it the ability to dispatch RCMP officers to quickly enforce municipal and provincial legislation.

And yes as well, empowering banks and financial institutions to put a stop to the flow of proceeds that could advance the illegal blockades as quickly as possible, all of which, of course, being within the parameters of the law and the Charter, and, and we'll continue to do what we can to give police those tools, but we trust them to restore public safety. I mean, to your point, yes you're right, people don't want to hear about jurisdiction. They're not interested in the, in the nuances. What I think people in Ottawa expect and have every right to see happen is that public order will be restored as soon as possible.

Moderator: Okay, let's turn now to Marieke Walsh and then Boris Proulx, Le Devoir. Marieke.

Question: Hi there. Thanks very much for taking our questions. Minister Mendicino, my questions are also for you. First on your comments that, that, I believe you said something along the lines of nobody wants to see a repeat of the last three weeks and the police appreciate that. So what guarantees can you give Ottawa residents that things will change, how quickly will they change, and how are you able to ensure that there is not a repeat, given that it's Tuesday, we've lost a day, there's no police chief and there's a long weekend coming up and we know more protesters will come?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well I think that's a very fair question. And all I can assure you and to everybody who's watching is that we have conveyed the concerns of the community here in Ottawa. And we've done it in a way that is honest and direct. We have expressed the degree of anxiety, the concerns and these are not just images on social media. I know there's a lot of traffic over the course of the last three weeks. We're talking about people's lives. And so our job in government is to ensure that law enforcement understands and appreciates exactly what the community is feeling. The conversations that we've had, particularly with my colleagues who work in our government, Minister Fortier and MP Naqvi, have been extremely vocal, as has been all of the MPs who are members of the NCR caucus.

I want to be clear, not only in Ottawa but also in the, in the Gatineau region. And our job is to make sure that police understand that anxiety. And from the exchanges that I've had with, with the Commissioner, I believe that the RCMP understand it. And I know that they're working day and night to be sure that there is an operation that will be put into effect to restore public order. It isn't easy. You know, the illegal blockade has now become entrenched in the downtown over the last three weeks. You see trucks on Wellington Street, you see other structures, you know, you see fireworks going off, you see barriers that have been toppled. I mean, there's a, there's a lot of work that needs to be done, but the point that I would just make is that, you know, from my conversations with law enforcement at the federal level, that they understand that challenge and they're going to work day and night to make sure that there isn't a repeat.

Question: Thank you for that response. And going to another comment that I heard repeatedly from yourself and your colleagues, the government keeps pointing to the situation at Coutts as a justification, or one of the justifications for the Emergencies Act being invoked, but the police were able to deal with circumstances in Coutts without the Emergencies Act. So why is it that we need the Emergencies Act if police in Windsor and in Alberta were able to do their job and to enforce public order and bring an end to these blockades without the act in place?

Hon. Marco Mendicino:

Well first, I want to acknowledge the exceptional work of the RCMP, not only in Coutts, but in British Columbia and in Surrey, as well as in Windsor to restore public order and remove those illegal blockades so that we can get trade moving again. I mean, the devastation that was caused as a result of the obstructions to those who were participating in the illegal blockades is, is very deep and it needs to be turned around. But as I explained yesterday, we can't take for granted the gains that have been made by law enforcement using existing authorities.

And one of the rationales for invoking the Emergencies Act is so that we can put into effect additional tools to prevent another illegal blockade from occurring. And here I'm thinking about, and I'm thinking about Windsor in particular and making sure that the Ambassador Bridge remains open, putting our hands on the additional barriers and tow trucks that are needed to keep flow moving as much as possible. So yes, you're right, there have, there have been a number of arrests and seizures that have been made with pre-existing authorities, but we don't want it to occur again.

And that's why the measures which we have introduced under the Emergencies Act, which are temporary, they're targeted, they're geographically specific and they are intended to operate in concert with pre-existing provincial authorities, including where the RCMP are the police of jurisdiction, is a way in which we think we can hold on to the gains that we have made and keep the borders and the bridges open and our national symbols safe.

Moderator:

Nous avons Boris Proulx et puis une personne ici. A very patient person. I know you also have Question Period, but let's start with the question on the phone here.

Question:

Bonjour. Ma première question est pour M. Duclos. J'ai les données devant moi et aux dernières nouvelles, soit le 29 janvier, il y avait près de 5% des tests PCR à la frontière qui revenaient positifs. Donc, ce deuxième test. Donc, si mon calcul est bon, dans un avion, il y a une personne à gauche, une personne à droite, ça fait une chance sur 10 que quelqu'un assis à côté de vous soit infectée à la COVID-19. J'aimerais savoir est-ce que vous baissez pas les bras par rapport au fait de l'importation de nouveaux variants au Canada? C'était votre principal argument pour maintenir ce, ce deuxième test là jusqu'à maintenant.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:

Bien merci pour la question. Et vous avez raison, il faut continuer d'être très vigilant et prudent d'une manière générale et à la frontière en particulier. Et ce que l'on voit, et c'est ce qu'on attendait de voir, c'est que ces taux de positivité baissent, baissent assez rapidement. Les derniers estimés datent de la fin janvier, nous sommes déjà rendus à la mi-février et on croit là que d'ici les deux prochaines semaines là, même si ça prendra toujours un petit peu de temps avant d'avoir les chiffres précis, la situation va continuer à s'améliorer, ce qui ne veut pas dire que voyager vient sans risque et c'est pour ça là qu'on continue à inviter les gens à faire preuve de prudence et d'intelligence lorsqu'ils décident de voyager à l'étranger.

Donc, le, le passage là du niveau 3 à niveau 2 ne veut pas dire que voyager ne vient, vient sans risque à partir de maintenant, et ça veut aussi dire que au retour au Canada, bien il faut faire attention. Et c'est pour ça que avant qu'on connaît l'utilité des multiples couches, c'est pour ça que la couche de pré-départ, même si elle permet maintenant l'usage d'un test rapide antigénique, cette couche reste pour s'assurer que les gens puissent se protéger eux-mêmes et protéger, comme vous l'avez dit, ceux qu'ils vont croiser durant leur, leur voyage et ceux qu'ils vont croiser une fois de retour au pays.

Question:

Merci. Et en suivi, c'est pour votre collègue, M. Mendicino. Le premier ministre hier a confirmé que la loi s'appliquait partout au Canada mais qu'elle serait utilisée uniquement là où nécessaire et vous avez précisé il y a un instant là que ce serait en concert avec les forces de polices provinciales. Donc ma question est très simple, est-ce que le fédéral pourrait imposer ou utiliser ces mesures même dans les provinces qui, qui n'en veulent pas, comme en Alberta, comme au Manitoba, par exemple?

Hon. Marco Mendicino:

Je pense que vous avez bien expliqué la façon comment la loi d'urgence vont être implémentées (sic) sur le terrain. Il y a des outils dans cette loi qui sont nouveaux et qui sont, on peut ajouter, on peut utiliser les outils de cette loi dans des régions géographiques très spécifiquement. Et peut-être le plus important chose (sic) est les outils au-dessus cette (inaudible) vont être utilisés en collaboration avec les autorités de les provinces et les territoires. C'est un, ça c'était une chose que le premier ministre avait bien expliquée à tous les premiers ministres de les provinces et les territoires. (sic) Et on relié (sic) sur les services des policières (sic) de travail ensemble avec leurs homologues fédéral, provinciaux et même locaux (sic) pour l'implémentation de cette loi spéciale.

Moderator:

Ministers, thank you. Merci. I know you have to get to Question Period. I'd also, there's one reporter who might be able to squeeze something in, but I realize you have to walk through the trucks across the street to, to QP. So thank you very much for your time. Merci. Miigwetch.

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